

Gurmel Singh Narang Transcription

Interview Date: November 22m 2014

SB: Uncle Ji what is your full name?

GN: It is Gurmail Singh Narang.

SB: What is your birth year and birth place?

GN: May 15, 1949.

SB: And where in India Uncle Ji?

GN: Which pind?

SB: Yes sir.

GN: Dhudike.

SB: In what year did you come to Canada?

GN: I came in January 1971.

SB: At that time what was your immigration status?

GN: As a visitor.

SB: Not on family class, economic class or points based system?

GN: Upon coming here I applied on point basis and then I got my immigration.

SB: Points basis--

GN: --Then you had to get 50 points if you want to stay in Canada. You were allowed to come to Canada and apply in Canada at that time.

SB: What is your immigration status now?

GN: I am a Canadian citizen.

SB: Before coming to Canada where did you live?

GN: I lived in the pind Dhudike.

SB: At that time did you work in India?

GN: I studied in college.

SB: What were you studying?

GN: I was doing my BA.

SB: When you came here what mill did you start working in?

GN: I started working in 1972 in Nicola Valley sawmill in Merritt.

SB: And how did you find that work?

GN: My friends found it and recommended by my bhua.

SB: Did you find any other work?

GN: I was working in the farm that time.

SB: What are your first memories of working in the mill?

GN: At that time you couldn't find work. There was a lot of discrimination. In this area I tried a lot at first to find work but didn't find anything. That's why beyond Hope our men could find work.

SB: Uncle Ji do you remember the places you tried finding work at?

GN: Yes, yes. I tried in Port Alberni. I tried in Vancouver, New Westminster, and Uba City on Vancouver Island...there I tried to apply too.

SB: In sawmills you--

GN: In sawmills. A lot of our men worked in mills then.

SB: What job did you start working at in the mill?

GN: At the plywood mill, veneer plant plywood was being made and I started at the chain and then I worked the forklift and then I operated the leath. I worked all the jobs.

SB: In Nicola Valley sawmill?

GN: They call it sawmill. They start a new veneer plant that was making plywood. Veneer only raw materials and then it was shipped to a plywood mill. Then they make the plywood.

SB: Did you only work in one mill or..?

GN: No I worked in quite a few mills.

SB: Do you remember which ones they were?

GN: Yes.

SB: Tell me please.

GN: I started there in 71...72 [Nicola Valley]. In 73 I got married. In 1974 we went to meet in Port Alberni and there I went to apply at...it was called APD. Port Alberni Pacific Division Mill. There I worked in the lumber mill. On the first day I worked on the chain then slowly, slowly I got the grading ticket. In the first year I got grading. Then I started grading. Lumber grade. There I worked until 78. Then from there I got myself transferred to Vancouver. My parents came in 77 so in 78 I got a transfer here to McMillan White pine. It was on Marine Drive in Vancouver.

SB: Is that the mill they called 'Triple W'?

GN: No. White Pine. McMillan White pine Mill. And then I worked in Asa Johal's mill. In 83 I was laid off and then in '83 I went to Asa's mill. There I worked until 2001.

SB: When did you stop working in the mill?

GN: Uhh in 2001.

SB: What was the reason?

GN: I had a problem. Arthritis.

SB: Was the arthritis a result of mill work?

GN: Yes because of the mill work. Grading work was heavy. It happened because of grading.

SB: When you worked in the mill what things did you find difficult?

GN: At first everything seemed difficult. Then you get used to, you know? Work was hard and bosses gave a lot of work. When pay would go up they would increase the workload. They took extra work. I was the only grader. When I left that job, two graders did the work that I did. Next day they couldn't do the work I did so they put two graders there.

SB: What did you like?

GN: This I liked...I was doing farming at the same time. Like 1978 when I moved from Port Alberni I bought a farm here in Abbotsford. I and my brother was partner. He was looking after the farm and I was working in the mill. And I was doing both.

SB: When you worked in the mill, did it help you become a good Canadian citizen?

GN: Yes. We were making good money. I started \$1.25 an hour. Right from \$1.25 we started getting \$3.45 in Merritt. We were proud we were making good money. And there was a lot of overtime and I was young. I was only 22 or 23 years old so I can handle...I worked 3 shifts one time. All three shifts then came home. Then sleep.

SB: When you worked in the mill, were the men that worked there mostly our men or from other cultures?

GN: No. There were all communities there. There were red Indians—Native Indians. There were gorey too. There were our people too. There were 8 of our boys and the rest were all gorey and Natives.

SB: At that time, how many men were there in total?

GN: At that time there were about 20 men start based. Two shifts ran. 10 men made up a shift.

SB: Do you have any other stories of the mill?

GN: When you help each other...like I had a friend in Port Alberni. No one would do his job and he wanted to learn grading and jobs used to be posted. I told him I'll free you up and so I started his job. The job wasn't very good. It was a painting job. Paint would get on things. They called it stencil. We would paint it on to loads. I left that and then that man helped me a lot. In turn he helped me learn grading. Our men's habit was to teach junior workers how to grade, they didn't teach someone senior to

them how to grade. They didn't want them to bump them out. Bump was...it would be their turn...they would get in front and the other person would get behind. Union men got more training. I was junior to everyone so I got training quickly. I got training for both plainers. There was one big plainer that was automatic and there was a small plainer. The foreman trained me on both plainers. Then I was grading since that. Like from 76 to 2001 I just graded. I didn't do millwork, I worked at the plainer. They call it final grade. The lumber goes out grade ok.

SB: That's it my questions are done. Kusum do you have anything else?

KS: Are there any other memories/experiences you would like to share?

GN: I didn't come prepared. I didn't know you would be doing the interview today. Gorey would get very jealous. You may have heard the news yesterday people were sitting in tents saying close immigration that we can't find jobs. You must have heard this news. Immigration...they would do this a lot. When they opened immigration there wasn't that many people. They were looking for trouble. On the weekends they would say come fight us. They would trouble us when we would go to the mill. Harassment. Gorey would harass. In the mills there wasn't harassment. Because fires could start and the foreman would know but outside they would do it when we would come up the road. So we had to come together. There weren't cars then we would come to work walking.

KS: What kind of harassment was it? Physical?

GN: Not physical, they would abuse. That you're Pakistani. Go back to Pakistan or India like they do now sometimes. It happened a lot in small towns and less in big towns. Our population was very little then. So then we boys would come together. Two to four we had to beat a bit when they didn't stop...then we got together a beat them a lot. Police wouldn't even listen. If we called police they wouldn't come. Police never comes. So when we beat them then they stopped. They would out these people....they were very afraid of sticks. Gorey are more afraid of sticks. Hit more with fists you already know.

KS: Are there some good experiences too?

GN: There a good experiences too. A made a lot of friends there. The man that put me on work gave me advice that no one should give trouble. I say you never hear from me.

KS: Gora or apna?

GN: He was apna. He was a foreman. His name was Lal Singh Mall. He had a contract at the mill. He stayed supervisor for a long time. He put all our men in the mill. Quite a few men from our families. Like Dialo's husband, Prem...we all worked at that mill.

KS: What was the name's mill? Can you say again please?

GN: Nicola Valley Saw Mill in Merritt, BC.